

EXECUTIVE DECISION

From: **Rory Love, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: **Children's and Young People's Cabinet Committee – 16 January 2025**

Subject: **24/00121 SEND strategy 2025-2028**

Key/non-key decision – *affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions*

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: All divisions

Summary: This report introduces the SEND Strategy 2025-2028 for Kent County Council, and the KENT SEND system, which comprises a comprehensive plan to enhance the provision of services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The strategy reflects the outcomes of extensive engagement with stakeholders, including parents, carers, educators, health and social care professionals, and young people themselves.

The strategy supports "Framing Kent's Future 2022-2026" by promoting social inclusion, enhancing educational outcomes, building a skilled workforce, strengthening community health, and ensuring sustainable development.

The strategy aligns with key legislation, including the Children and Families Act 2014, SEND Code of Practice 2015, and Equality Act 2010, ensuring compliance with statutory duties.

The SEND Strategy 2025-2028 is an ambitious plan designed to improve the lives of children and young people with SEND in Kent. It emphasises inclusivity, collaboration, and sustainable development, aiming to create a supportive environment where all individuals can thrive. By adopting this strategy, Kent County Council commits to significant improvements in SEND services, aligning with broader strategic goals and securing a brighter future for the SEND community.

Recommendation(s): The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on the proposed decision as detailed in the Proposed Record of Decision.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report introduces the new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy for Kent, covering the period from 2025 to 2028. This strategy has been developed to support the local area in responding to the growing and diverse needs of children and young people with SEND across the county. It outlines a comprehensive framework designed to enhance the provision, inclusivity, and outcomes of SEND services addressing five ambitions

1. Child-Centred Approach
2. Collaborative Service Provision
3. Countywide Inclusion
4. Family Engagement and Participation
5. Independence Pathways

1.2 Implementation of this strategy will:

- Affirm the commitment of Kent County Council to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- Ensure work in Kent aligns with national legislative frameworks and addresses local needs assessments.
- Support the provision of a clear and actionable roadmap for the development and implementation of SEND services over the next three years.
- Facilitate the allocation of necessary resources and support for the effective execution of the strategy.
- Enable ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure continuous improvement and accountability in delivering SEND services.

2. Development of the Strategy

2.1 Kent County Council is committed to providing high-quality, inclusive educational and support services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reflecting government policy and best practice. The development of the SEND Strategy 2025-2028 builds upon previous work and addresses both longstanding and emerging challenges within the SEND landscape.

2.2 In recent years, the Kent SEND system has faced significant challenges in meeting statutory duties and delivering SEND services, as highlighted by past inspections from OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The 2019 inspection resulted in a written statement of action, and a subsequent 2022 revisit noted insufficient progress in all areas. These findings underscored the need for a robust, comprehensive strategy to support a co-ordinated approach by the system to addressing gaps and improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

2.3 The shared vision that we work together to "Support children and young people to achieve; through living healthy, safe lives in which they feel seen and included." was informed by consultation with children and young people and has been agreed by all the key stakeholders. This vision has informed the SEND strategy, the draft Education Strategy and the draft Accessibility Strategy and supporting guidance, which were all drafted and consulted on at a similar time. This co-ordinated approach to strategy and policy development ensures

alignment and better supports the achievement of the overall vision for all children and young people.

2.4 Key elements guiding the strategy's development include:

- **Legislative Frameworks:** Alignment with the SEND Code of Practice (0-25 years) 2015, Children and Families Act 2014, Equality Act 2010, and other relevant laws and regulations.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Regular feedback sessions and focus groups with parents, carers, children, young people, and professionals to gather insights and ensure the strategy reflects their needs and aspirations.
- **Evidence-Based Approaches:** Analysis of current data, best practices, and innovative approaches to SEND service delivery.

2.5 The new SEND Strategy incorporates the Children and Young People's Outcomes Framework, which was developed with the input of young people to include the additional dimension of 'My Independence', see diagram below.



2.6 Building on the effective elements of the previous strategy, this SEND Strategy 2025-2028 was developed through extensive engagement and collaboration with various stakeholders, including health and social care professionals, educators, parents, carers, and young people with SEND. As a result of our extensive engagement and evidence-based analysis, five ambitions were identified as the cornerstone of this strategy. These ambitions reflect the collective priorities of stakeholders, including parents, carers, educators, and young people themselves and more detail can be seen below.

1. Child-Centred Approach:

Objective: Empower children and young people with SEND to actively participate in decisions about their education, support, and future.

Actions: Develop self-advocacy skills, create participation opportunities, and foster a culture of inclusion.

2. Collaborative Service Provision:

Objective: Enhance partnerships between education, health, and social care services to provide seamless support.

Actions: Establish multi-agency teams, promote efficient information sharing, and coordinate assessments and interventions.

3. Countywide Inclusion:

Objective: Promote inclusive practices across all schools and community services.

Actions: Conduct comprehensive needs assessments, develop inclusive policies, and provide ongoing professional development for educators and service providers.

4. Family Engagement and Participation:

Objective: Strengthen engagement with parents and carers by providing accessible information and support.

Actions: Establish parent support groups, implement regular consultations, and ensure transparent communication with families.

5. Independence Pathways:

Objective: Establish a continuum of support from early years through post-16 education to facilitate independence.

Actions: Develop strategic plans for transitions, build capacity for better support, and focus on promoting independence and future success.

2.7 Examples of performance indicators and data that will be used to monitor and evaluate the successful implementation are included in the strategy document. There are ambitious plans to also evaluate the SEND strategy through the use of the Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People at a pupil level. A five point scale is being developed for each dimension to allow for individual pupil input to be recorded on each dimension and for changes to be monitored over time. Officers are currently considering the most effective way of collecting, collating and analysing the data and pathfinder activity will commence in mid-2025.

3. Alternative Options Considered

3.1 Options considered include:

Option 1: Extending the current SEND strategy

Description: Continue with the current SEND strategy without significant changes.

Risks: The current strategy had significant shortcomings identified by Ofsted and CQC and does not reflect the current work of the SEND services. This option risks perpetuating existing challenges, such as insufficient progress in key areas, lack of coordinated services, and inadequate support for families and children with SEND. It may also fail to meet the expectations set by previous inspections and stakeholder feedback. It was therefore discarded.

Option 2: Incremental Improvements

Description: Implement gradual changes and improvements to the existing SEND strategy.

Risks: While this option could address some issues, the pace of change may be too slow to achieve the desired outcomes. Incremental improvements may not be sufficient to address the systemic issues identified in inspections and feedback from stakeholders. It was therefore discarded.

3.2 Risk Management

Implementing the SEND Strategy requires significant resources to be allocated differently, along with coordination and continuous monitoring. There is a risk of resistance to change from some stakeholders and potential challenges in aligning various agencies and services. However, implementing a new SEND Strategy offers the best opportunity to achieve meaningful and sustainable improvements in SEND provision.

3.3 To mitigate the risks associated with its implementation, the following measures will be applied:

- Stakeholder Engagement: Maintain ongoing communication and collaboration with all stakeholders to foster buy-in and address concerns promptly.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish robust mechanisms for monitoring progress and evaluating the impact of the strategy, allowing for adjustments as needed.
- Capacity Building: Provide training and support to educators, healthcare providers, and other professionals involved in SEND services to build capacity and enhance service delivery.
- Governance: To use the agreed new governance structure, building on the work of the previous SEND Improvement and Assurance Board, to oversee the strategy's implementation and ensure accountability.

3.4 The SEND Strategy 2025-2028 represents a comprehensive and ambitious plan to improve the provision and outcomes of SEND services in Kent. By adopting this strategy, the Council will demonstrate its commitment to creating an inclusive, supportive, and high-quality SEND framework that meets the needs of children, young people, and their families. Approval of this strategy will pave the way for meaningful and sustainable improvements, ensuring that every child and young person with SEND in Kent can achieve their full potential.

4. How the proposed decision supports Framing Kent's Future 2022-2026

4.1 The proposed SEND Strategy 2025-2028 is closely aligned with the strategic priorities outlined in "Framing Kent's Future 2022-2026." This overarching plan aims to create a county that is prosperous, healthy, and inclusive. The SEND Strategy supports these ambitions through several key initiatives:

Priority 1: Levelling Up Kent

Objective: To ensure that all communities in Kent have access to opportunities and resources that enable them to thrive.

Support from SEND Strategy:

Inclusive Education: By promoting inclusive practices across all schools and services, the SEND Strategy ensures that children and young people with SEND have equitable access to high-quality education and support, thus contributing to the levelling up of educational opportunities across the county.

Local Access to Services: The strategy emphasizes improving local service provision, reducing the need for children and young people with SEND to travel long distances to access necessary support. This aligns with the aim to provide equal access to services across all communities in Kent.

Priority 2: Infrastructure for Communities

Objective: To develop infrastructure that supports the well-being and development of Kent's communities.

Support from SEND Strategy:

Service Integration: The strategy promotes enhanced partnerships and multi-agency collaboration between education, health, and social care services. This integrated approach ensures that infrastructure and services are better coordinated and more effective in meeting the needs of the SEND community.

Capacity Building: By providing ongoing professional development for educators and service providers, the strategy builds capacity within the local infrastructure to deliver high-quality, inclusive support for SEND, thereby strengthening the community's overall resilience and well-being.

Priority 3: Environmental Step Change

Objective: To ensure Kent's environment as a core asset that is valued, strengthened and protected.

Support from SEND Strategy:

Holistic Support: The SEND Strategy's provides an opportunity to focus on the Outcomes Framework, to address the community and make improvements through the voice of children and young people. The holistic approach will ensure that all communities through Kent have access to outdoor areas.

Family Engagement: By strengthening family engagement and providing accessible information and support, the strategy helps families to have access to more areas in their communities, with the opportunity to improve open spaces to better support the health and well-being of their children, fostering a healthier and more supportive home environment.

Priority 4: New Models of Care and Support

Objective: To ensure collaborative working through the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System

Support from SEND Strategy:

The strategy includes elements from SEND, Health, Joint Commissioning and Early years, highlighting the collaborative efforts from the services within KCC. Early engagement opportunities facilitated by the ICB with the community to

design and update the Outcomes Framework and the Vision statement, ensuring the reflection of children and young people.

4.2 The proposed SEND Strategy 2025-2028 is designed to support and enhance the strategic priorities set out in "Framing Kent's Future 2022-2026." By addressing the specific needs of children and young people with SEND through inclusive education, integrated services, and pathways to independence, the strategy contributes to the broader goals of creating a prosperous, healthy, and inclusive Kent. This alignment ensures that the initiatives within the SEND Strategy not only meet the immediate needs of the SEND community but also support the long-term vision for the county's future.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The Local Authority funds services to support special educational needs through a combination of both General Fund and a ring-fenced grant from the Department of Education (known as the High Needs Block (HNB) of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)). The HNB is expected to contribute towards the cost of provision & additional resources for pupils & students with SEN to participate in education & learning; whilst the General Fund is expected to cover the cost of delivering the local authority's statutory duties in relation to assessment, annual reviews and strategic planning of SEN, along with home to school/post 16 transport policies. Spend is reported against the following key service lines within the [Cabinet Financial Monitoring Report](#), along with further detail on spend funded from the HNB in section 3g:

- Special Educational Needs & Psychology Services, total net forecast £17.7m
- Home to School & College Transport, SEN total net forecast £75m
- Schools Budget: High Needs Block (DSG), total net forecast £391m
- In addition to the High Needs Capital Budget estimated to be £72m (covering commitments between 24-25 to 26-27)

5.2 Spend on SEN services has been increasing in recent years, due to a combination of rising demand and cost. This has been reflected in £11m increase in the General Fund budget requirement for SEN assessments & planning services and £44m increase in budget for SEN related Home to School transport costs, over the past 5 years. At the same time, the costs of education services funded from the HNB has grown faster than increases in the grant resulting in a current overspend approximately 13% (+£53m). The increasing overspend on the HNB resulted in the Council entering the Safety Valve agreement at the beginning of 2023, whereby the Department of Education will give £140m towards the forecast accumulated deficit of £222m by March 2028, in return for the Council working towards eliminating the in-year overspend and operating within the grant provided. The Council also committed £82m of Council tax monies to help pay off the remaining residual accumulated deficit. The additional contributions from the DfE and the Council have avoided the requirement for significant cuts to the SEN services. The strategy sets the overarching approach to improving the SEND system and how impact will be monitored and evaluated. These approaches align to actions set out in the safety valve [agreement](#). It supports the work of KCC to develop a financially sustainable SEND system and fulfil the statutory duty to deliver within budget

(as summarised in section 5). The strategy is expected to ensure robust and targeted resource allocation for successful implementation.

5.3 Following recent investments in the SEN assessment service, re-prioritisation of existing resources, initially used to support the clearance of backlog in assessments and annual review, will be redirected to support the continual and future delivery of staffing resources, joint commissioning, participation opportunities for children, parents & other professionals, monitoring & guidance/personalised plan materials set out in the strategy. No additional funding requirement is expected from the General Fund at this time. Actions to support the delivery of inclusive education and preparation for adulthood will be expected to be funded through the prioritisation of HNB within the resources available from Department of Education.

6. Legal implications

6.1 The strategy aligns with key legislation, including the Children and Families Act 2014, SEND Code of Practice 2015, and Equality Act 2010, ensuring compliance with statutory duties.

7. Equalities implications

7.1 While this strategy sets the high-level vision and approach, equality impacts for specific initiatives will be addressed within the relevant project-level Equality Impact Assessments. This ensures that equality considerations are effectively integrated throughout implementation.

7.2 Consultation Feedback

The development of this strategy was shaped by insights from an 8-week public consultation process.

Key themes included:

- Simplifying language and reducing jargon for accessibility.
- Addressing concerns about the strategy's readability and structure by adopting a more visual and concise approach.
- Emphasising measurable actions to support the ambitions outlined.

Respondents appreciated the renewed focus on collaboration and inclusivity but highlighted the need for actionable, measurable goals. These insights have directly informed the refinements to the strategy, ensuring it is both ambitious and practical.

8. Governance

8.1 The Director of Education and SEND will inherit the main delegations via the Officer Scheme of Delegation.

9. Conclusion

9.1 The SEND Strategy 2025-2028 is a comprehensive and ambitious plan that lays the groundwork for a more inclusive, supportive, and high-quality SEND framework in Kent. Its successful implementation will require the collective effort of all stakeholders, continuous monitoring, and a commitment to ongoing improvement.

The approval of the SEND Strategy 2025-2028 is a critical step in advancing the Council's vision for an inclusive, supportive, and high-quality SEND provision across Kent. The strategy is designed to address current challenges, leverage opportunities, and enhance the lives of children and young people with SEND and their families.

By endorsing this strategy, the Council takes a significant step towards securing a brighter future for all children and young people with SEND in Kent.

10. Recommendation(s):

The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills on the proposed decision as detailed in the Proposed Record of Decision.

11. Background Documents

CATIE Link: [A Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education](#)

Kent Transition charter Link: [Kent Transition Charter](#)

Co- Production Charter Link: [Send Co-production Charter](#)

12. Appendices

- SEND Strategy 2025-28
- Proposed Record of Decision
- Equality Impact Assessment

13. Contact Details

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